The absence of legal remedies following academic bullying

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Summary

Currently, victims of discrimination and sexual harassment have institutional reporting systems and legal remedies which support them in finding justice for these crimes. However, victims of academic bullying, who suffer similar repercussions, have no legal or institutional remedies. Because academic bullying is not a crime, targets often suffer in silence because there is no recourse. It is time for institutions to ask for governmental support to create legislation, similar to that for sexual harassment and discrimination, which will bring justice to academic bullies and relief to their victims. In the absence of legislation, institutions should create reporting procedures and educational programs which mirror those they have in place for sexual harassment and discrimination.

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Targets of sexual harassment/violence and academic bullying suffer from similar long-term serious emotional, mental, organizational and physical side effects. Although the targets of sexual harassment have a well-defined path toward speaking up and getting support in many ways,1 4 the targets of academic bullying have no legal recourse.5

One of the main problems is the absence of laws and organizational guidelines on academic bullying. While institutions and funding agencies have strict and well-defined legal policies for dealing with sexual harassment, they are ill-equipped to deal with academic bullying.6 Fear of legal consequences has forced institutions and funding agencies to invest in educational programs and easy-to-access, reliable reporting systems for sexual harassment with minimum risk of retaliation. In contrast, although academic bullying results in similar side effects on targets, it is not illegal unless it is concomitant with sexual violence or discrimination based on sex, race, and so forth.

We strongly believe that the scientific community desperately needs the help of government to consider all aspects of academic bullying and propose appropriate legislation to support, and find justice for the targets. In the presence of legal actions, all stakeholders will treat academic bullying incidences similar to sexual harassment or discrimination and therefore create suitable educational and reporting systems that can substantially minimize the bullying problem in science. In the absence of strong legislation, institutions should create reporting and accountability systems which mirror those in place

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for sexual harassment, pairing these with educational programs aimed at reducing the occurrence of bullying in academic science.

We are currently conducting a survey on academic bullying and would like your participation. Whether or not you’ve been a witness to or target, we would appreciate you completing our survey: https://wakeforest.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0uZSsSrmezjDVnb7.

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**Authors’ contribution**
Both authors contributed equally in this work.

**References**